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Reagan-Shamir Talks Focusing On Cooperation

President Reagan and his top advisers are meeting behind closed doors with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Defense Minister Moshe Arens. Here's what they're talking about:

The most important topic—the principal reason for Shamir's visit—is how to implement the Reagan administration's decision to cooperate more closely with Israel in Lebanon. As I reported earlier, on Oct. 29 the president signed a secret National Security Decision Directive calling for closer strategic coordination with Israel in the Middle East.

The decision was intended to strengthen Reagan's hand at the diplomatic poker table. By the implicit threat to unleash the Israeli Army with support from U.S. naval and air forces off Lebanon, the president hopes to wring concessions out of Syrian President Hafez Assad without the use of U.S. ground troops.

For their part, sources told my associate Lucette Lagnado, the Israelis are suspicious of the Reagan administration's motives. They question Reagan's sincerity and fear that his

support for Israel is just an election-year tactic aimed at the Jewish vote.

The second point under discussion is the Israeli-Lebanese agreement on the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon. Though it was largely the handiwork of Secretary of State George P. Shultz, there is some evidence that the administration now wants Israel to let the agreement lapse.

The reason is that Assad regards the troop withdrawal agreement as the equivalent of, or at least the first step toward, Lebanon's recognition of Israel. To the Syrian president, any move by an Arab state that legitimizes Israel's existence is bad news. Dissolution of the agreement would be a sop to Assad, in hopes of moderating his opposition to Reagan's Middle East peace plan.

The trouble, of course, is that the agreement is also considered important by Israel, and for the same reason. Lebanon would be the first Arab state after Egypt to recognize Israel. So Shamir will refuse to abrogate the agreement and, for the time being, the administration will continue to support it.

A third, almost as sticky, point at issue is the U.S. plan to create a Jordanian rapid deployment force with close American military support. Here, my sources suggest, Shamir and Arens will be more likely to go along with Reagan. The principal reason, again, is Assad.

U.S. intelligence agencies, and presumably the Israelis as well, are increasingly concerned about evidence of a Syrian "master plan" for expansion. Assad, who has never been faulted for lack of ambition, is suspected of trying to implement the following timetable of conquest: first, the Palestine Liberation Organization, then Lebanon, then Jordan and ultimately Israel.

Assad has pretty well succeeded in destroying Yasser Arafat's power and bringing the PLO under Syrian authority. He already has made a start on phase two by undermining the Lebanese Christian regime of Amin Gemayel.

And there are reports that he has even begun phase three by arranging car bombs in Amman and assassination of Jordanian diplomats abroad. King Hussein has issued bold denunciations of Syria, but privately the Jordanians are worried sick.

Under the circumstances, Israeli leaders have far less to fear from a strengthened Hussein, so they will probably concede on the Jordanian rapid deployment force the Reagan administration has its heart set on.

The Kremlin is as concerned about Assad's ambitions as the Americans and Israelis are. Intelligence sources have reported evidence that the Soviets have been trying to rein in the Syrians, but so far without success.